

THE VALUE OF OUR BUSHFIRE CRC

AN URBAN FIRE SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

As the industry plans for the future of fire research in Australasia, the urban fire services need to determine the nature of the benefits flowing from the work of the Bushfire CRC.

The first important point to make is that many urban fire services have extensive bushfire prone areas (the rural-urban interface) on their borders and/or within their areas of responsibility. There are significant tracts of 'bushland' within close proximity of Australia's capital cities. Many of these areas have experienced bush fire events in recent years. Urban fire services are benefiting from the preliminary results from the Bushfire CRC's research and these benefits will increase as more current research reaches finality.

Secondly, whilst the Bushfire CRC was established as a bushfire research initiative many of the projects and issues that are explored have a direct application in an urban context. For example, projects such as (D2) 'fire fighter fitness requirements' have explored the issues of hydration, fatigue and fitness for duty. The findings of these investigations can be immediately translated into an urban context. Similarly physiological and psychological factors impacting on incident management decision making (projects D.2.3 and D.5) or the study into the impact of wind patterns or atmospheric changes (Projects B.2.1) are just as applicable to a major hazardous materials incident as they are to a bush fire. The question of what attracts a person to become or remain a volunteer fire

fighter (Project D3) might be applied to help all recruit better career fire fighters.

Other projects, whilst not so immediately applicable may well, as a matter of good scientific practice, identify and quantify a control situation (or 'base case') which is used as a point of reference to identify the impact of a particular event or activity. This 'base case' can be an important input into the assessment of the impact of any major event that can be used by either urban or rural fire services for this purpose. Examples of how this may be applied in the future are in understanding the carcinogens that are inhaled in a bushfire scenario (Bushfire CRC Projects D2.2 and D4). The base case from this study may be equally applied to the potential inhalation in any situation a fire fighter may be exposed to.

Case studies present similar opportunities and insights. The methodologies developed in current Bushfire CRC case studies to explore the community preparedness for bushfire, or the impact that these fires have on the community, identify the best practice that should be used when considering similar studies following any major event. Furthermore the issues uncovered highlight those factors that urban fire services may consider or explore in both post incident analysis and our policy making, whether this be in an urban or rural setting.

Finally, and notwithstanding any of the direct results of the specific research projects, the

Bushfire CRC contributes directly to the development of enhanced research skills across the industry. Through individual and collective involvement with world class researchers we all learn how to apply state of the art research methods; we learn how to distinguish between good research and bad, and what we need to do to ensure that any research we commission or research that we conduct is sound. As a result of this we can ensure that our industry as a whole is more sustainable in an economic environment that is focused on accountability, transparency and evidence based decision making.

It remains essential that urban fire services continue to be involved in the monitoring and the subsequent implementation of current Bushfire CRC research to ensure that the benefits to both the urban based agencies, and across the fire and land management industry generally, are maximised.

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RESEARCH FOR URBAN FIRE SERVICES

Many of the Bushfire CRC research projects have a direct application to an urban context, including Project D2, above, that is looking at how fit firefighters need to be.